

Noteworthy bird records from São Tomé and Príncipe

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Observations remarquables d'oiseaux de São Tomé et Príncipe. Des observations remarquables d'une douzaine d'espèces d'oiseaux sont rapportées, faites à l'occasion de visites à São Tomé et Príncipe en juillet–août 2007 et janvier et août 2008.

We report noteworthy bird records made during trips to São Tomé and Príncipe in July–August 2007, and January and August 2008. For coordinates of the localities mentioned see Jones & Tye (2006).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

One near the mouth of the Rio Papagaio, Santo Antonio town, Príncipe, on 7 August 2007 (FO & LT; Fig. 1). It was feeding on the shallow ponds among the sand and mudflats with a Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and two dark-morph Western Reef Egrets *E. gularis*. Jones & Tye (2006) mention only one record from Príncipe, also at the mouth of the Rio Papagaio, in January in the mid 1990s.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*

One in a large grassy area around the Voice of America facilities south of São Tomé town, with several Whimbrels and Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*, on 18 January 2008 (Fig. 2). This appears to be the first record for São Tomé (Jones & Tye 2006), although the species was previously recorded on Príncipe, on 7 April 2003 (M. Melo in *Bull. ABC* 11: 77).

Dwarf Olive Ibis *Bostrychia bocagei*

On 23 January 2008 at least three were heard calling at dusk at our camp near Monte Carmo (sometimes known as Ribeira Peixe; 00°09'06"N 06°33'60"E). Next morning seven birds (including three pairs) were found on a forested plateau surrounded by deep valleys covering about 2.0 × 0.5 km. Most ibises were flushed from the ground and perched nearby. A Critically Endangered endemic, the population density at Ribeira Peixe seems fairly high.

African Crane *Crex egregia*

A medium-sized rail with a short bill, dark legs and a dull brown back mottled with black, flushed

from the track from Terreiro Velho to the Rio Pipi, Príncipe, just before the start of the Oquê Pipi trail, on 22 January 2008, was identified as an immature African Crane. On São Tomé, FO observed an adult crossing a track between São Vicente and Praia Piscina on 22 August 2008. The species is rarely recorded from São Tomé and Príncipe, where it is perhaps only a straggler (Jones & Tye 2006).

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

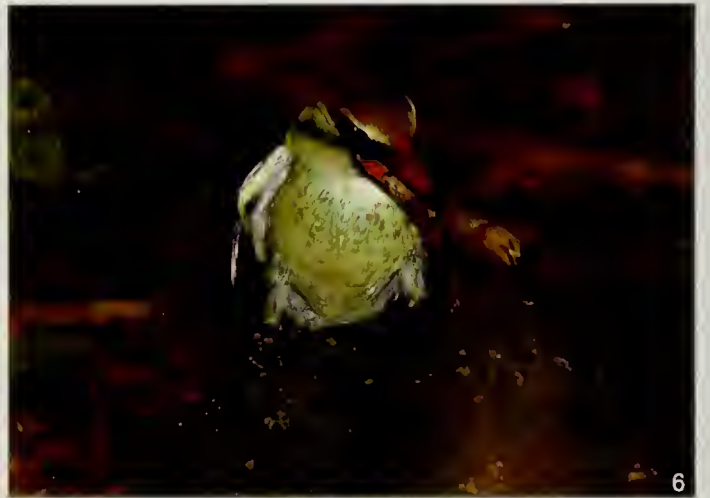
Two were foraging with a Whimbrel near the mouth of the Rio Papagaio, Príncipe, on 22 January 2008 (Fig. 4). Greenshanks have been recorded on the islands mainly in December–January (Christy & Clarke 1998), with few records from Príncipe (Jones & Tye 2006).

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

One on the east shore of Tinhosa Pequena and two groups of four birds each at Tinhosa Grande, near the slope allowing access to the island, on 21 January 2008 (Fig. 5). Considered uncommon on Príncipe, with only one record from the Tinhosas cited by Jones & Tye (2006). On 26 January 2008, one, with two Whimbrels, was photographed by APL at Praia Jalé, on the south-west coast of São Tomé.

Swifts *Apus* spp.

On 15 July 2007, LT and FO observed a pair of all-dark swifts, noticeably smaller than the Little Swifts *Apus affinis* nearby, over the outskirts of São Tomé. On 25 January 2008, SR also observed a small, all-dark swift with a square tail, over the dirt road between São Vicente and Praia Jalé, in south-west São Tomé. Common Swifts *A. apus* have been reported from São Tomé (Christy & Clarke 1998), but the birds we saw appeared too small and had square tails unlike that species, so their identity is uncertain.



Also, whilst the race *bannermani* of Little Swift is supposedly endemic to both Sao Tome and Príncipe, the Príncipe birds look noticeably smaller than those on São Tomé when compared to the abundant African Palm Swifts *Cypsiurus parvus*.

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica dryas*

One was observed smashing a land snail *Columna columna* against a rock on the trail to Oquê Pipi on 22 January 2008 (Fig. 6). The anvil had the remains of at least 100 *Columna* snails (*C. columna* or the similar *C. leai*). Three more anvils along the trail had mostly *Columna* spp. shells, but one had fragments of a small *Achatina bicarinata* and one crab. Anvils with broken snails found on Príncipe were first attributed to thrushes until it was realised that Príncipe kingfishers show this behaviour (Jones & Tye 2006), which is apparently unknown in mainland forms.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Two were perched on the wires of an antenna at Príncipe airport on 23 January 2008. One had the dark mottling on the chest of a first-winter;

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Figure 1. Little Egret / Égrette garzette *Egretta garzetta*, Santo Antonio, Príncipe, 7 August 2007 (F. Olmos)

Figure 2. Intermediate Egret / Égrette intermédiaire *Egretta intermedia*, the Voice of America facilities, São Tomé, 18 January 2008 (F. Olmos)

Figure 3. Dwarf Olive Ibis / Ibis de Bocage *Bostrychia bocagei*, Monte Carmo, São Tomé (A. P. Leventis)

Figure 4. Common Greenshank / Chevalier aboyeur *Tringa nebularia*, Santo Antonio, 22 January 2008 (A. P. Leventis)

Figure 5. Ruddy Turnstones / Tournepierres à collier *Arenaria interpres*, Tinhosa Grande, Príncipe, 21 January 2008 (A. P. Leventis)

Figure 6. Blue-breasted Kingfisher / Martin-chasseur à poitrine bleue *Halcyon malimbica* breaking a *Columna* snail against a rock, Oquê Pipi, Príncipe, 22 January 2008 (A. P. Leventis)

Figure 7. Yellow Wagtail / Bergeronnette printanière *Motacilla flava*, Praia Seca, Príncipe, 6 August 2007 (F. Olmos)

Figure 8. São Tomé Grosbeak / Néospize de São Tomé *Serinus (Neospiza) concolor*, Monte Carmo, São Tomé, 24 January 2008 (A. P. Leventis)

no details were noted of the second bird, as it flew off immediately. There appears to be only one old previous record, from Baía de Santo Antonio (Jones & Tye 2006).

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

On 6 August 2007, during a visit to Praia Seca (01°32'46"N 07°23'56"E), on the south-east coast of Príncipe, FO and LT observed a Yellow Wagtail in non-breeding plumage foraging on the beach near some fishermen huts (Fig. 7). It remained there throughout the afternoon and was still in the same area the following day.

The occurrence of wagtails *Motacilla* spp. in São Tomé and Príncipe has been a minor mystery. They were reported as fairly common in Príncipe during the second half of the 19th century, and it was suggested they were White Wagtails *M. alba*, but there are no specimens (Jones & Tye 2006). This seems to be the first documented record of this species for the country (Jones & Tye 2006).

Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys*

A group of four pipits seen twice flying over the landing strip of Príncipe airport on 23 January 2008 had unmarked, dark brown upperparts, buffish underparts without obvious spots or stripes, and buff outertail feathers. These features suggest Plain-backed Pipit, a common species in Nigeria with which PH is very familiar. Although in need of proper documentation, this seems to be the first country record for the species (Jones & Tye 2006).

São Tomé Grosbeak *Serinus (Neospiza) concolor*

A pair was feeding on the small green fruit of a *Dicranolepis thomensis* tree (a known food item) at Monte Carmo, at c.315 m, on 24 January 2008 (Fig. 8). The birds peeled the husk off and crushed the seed, and were readily attracted by whistles mimicking their single-note contact calls, similar to those of Príncipe Seedeater *Serinus rufobrunneus*, but much stronger, lending support to their suggested close relationship (Melo 2007). The birds approached closely, singing in response to the playback of a song recorded during a previous visit to the area (available at <http://xenocanto.org/africa>, XC 18131).

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